



7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100
www.voicesforchildren.com

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February 21, 2023

To: Chairperson Murman and Members of the Education Committee
From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska
RE: Support for LB 222, for prescribing requirements for the student application and admission process of public colleges and universities regarding criminal history and juvenile court record information

Education can be an important key to successful reentry. Every Nebraskan should have the same access to higher education, no matter their past circumstances. Eliminating barriers for individuals who were justice-involved and are seeking to attend public colleges and universities is good for all of Nebraska, because successful reintegration back into society for justice-involved individuals benefits the individual, their families, and our communities.¹ For these reasons, Voices for Children, supports LB 222 to increase access to higher education for young people seeking to move forward in their lives.

When colleges or universities ask about criminal history on applications, individuals are less likely to finish the application once they come across the question, which poses a significant barrier to enrollment. **At the same time, research also shows that previously justice-involved individuals who pursue education cut the likelihood of returning to prison within the first three years by over 40 percent.**² Simultaneously, research suggests that collecting applicants' criminal history doesn't make campuses safer.³ Excluding individuals, colleges and universities can reaffirm their commitment to equal opportunity and contribute to a stronger future by welcoming every otherwise qualified student.

Currently there are seven states that have passed legislation, termed Beyond the Box or Ban the Box, which eliminates the questions about past convictions.⁴ Opening up pathways for higher education to every Nebraskan impacted by the legal system can have a positive aftermath, not only for the individual allowing them an opportunity to lead productive lives but also for the greater community. LB 222 will help Nebraska foster campuses and classrooms with more diversity and inclusion, enriching overall educational experiences.

We want to thank Senator Fredrickson for bringing this important issue forward and the committee for your time. We urge you to advance it.

¹ "Wayback Machine." *Web.archive.org*, 20 Mar. 2021, web.archive.org/web/20210320201454/www2.ed.gov/documents/beyond-the-box/guidance.pdf.

² Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles, Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.

³ *THE USE of CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORDS in COLLEGE ADMISSIONS RECONSIDERED*. Center for Community Alternatives Innovative Solutions For Justice. use-of-criminal-history-records-reconsidered.pdf (communityalternatives.org)

⁴ Louisiana, Maryland, Colorado, Washington, California, Oregon and Virginia are the states with passed "Beyond the Box" legislation.